Stone her, not me

John 8:2-11

2 At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

In this story, the religious leaders brought a woman accused of adultery to the temple to be judged by religious leaders, but with no one there to defend her. The woman was being held against her will by "religious police." She was seen as an object, rather than through the lens of her humanity. The man caught in adultery with her, was not brought forth to be judged. The woman did not commit adultery by herself. Adultery is not the kind of offense that can be committed by one person; and yet the man she was caught with was not threatened with death for his actions. While the events in this story may seem very unlikely to still happen today reality is that there are women who are still without voice to advocate in their own defense. What would it look like for us to stand with women who do not have a voice to help to amplify their voices?

The religious leaders presented her as a sinner before Jesus but ignored their own sins. Bringing the woman to Jesus was not only meant to humiliate her but to test Jesus. Based on Jesus' response to the woman's situation the religious leaders wanted to accuse him of wrongdoing.

Jesus could not say that what the woman did was ok, nor could he condone the act of stoning her. We are quick to judge the sins and actions of others and condemn them yet expect mercy for ourselves.

The religious leaders wanted to stone the woman to death for committing adultery, in accordance with the Mosaic law. Stoning is still an atrocious act. It is easy to take a woman captive and silence her in a society where women are not as valued or honored as men. The reaction of Jesus not only causes us to look at this situation spiritually, but socially and culturally to renounce old ways and unfair judgment.

In some countries women are sold into marriage, they are not permitted to vote, work or have access to normal societal freedoms, and laws are made for women without a say in legislation. Women are left without advocates or a voice to defend themselves in societal systems like these. In this story, we see Jesus not condoning adultery. He was challenging the treatment of women. In bringing the woman to the temple the Pharisees were trying to embarrass the woman and Jesus. In verse 11, Jesus did not condemn her, but instead offered her forgiveness and freedom to make better choices for her life.

The sad reality is that hearing a story about a woman being stoned as a form of punishment is not uncommon. In 2015 the story of 19-year-old Rukhshana from Afghanistan sent shockwaves around the world when she was stoned for running away from home because she didn't want to be forced into an arranged marriage. No one should ever have to suffer like this no matter their religion or gender. When victims cry out, we must cry out with them and, like Jesus, stand in solidarity with them.

Reflection

What surprises you about this story?

How can we serve those who are marginalized based on their gender?

What are some ways our society can help heal marginalized women?

Prayer

God of mercy and grace. We ask for healing for a broken world and a chance for new life for women who have been mistreated.
have been mistreated.